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# MEDIA MONITORING FOR 2018 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS INTERIM REPORT





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The European Union for Georgia



## Media Monitoring for 2018 Presidential Elections in Georgia

# Interim Report of Media Monitoring of TV Talk Show

August 1 – October 15



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Tbilisi, 2018

## **About the Project**

The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics is conducting media monitoring within the frameworks of the project Study and Research on Election Media Coverage for the 2018 Presidential Elections in Georgia financed by the EU and the UNDP. The monitoring is focused on political talk shows during the prime time of 8 TV channels. The segments of the news programs, which offer interviews with respondents for more than 10 minutes are also included in the monitoring.

The following TV channels are monitored: Public Broadcaster (Channel One), Rustavi 2, Imedi, TV Pirveli, Iberia, Maestro, Obiektivi, Ajara TV. The monitoring started on August 1 of this year. Most of the talk shows started in the beginning of September, but some were launched later. This report provides the analysis of programs broadcasted from August 1 until October 15.

## **Methodology**

The following subjects were selected for the monitoring:

- President
- Government
- Political Parties

The monitors observed how the monitoring subjects were presented in the programs, and evaluated every talk show based on the following criteria: relevance of the selected topic, relevance of the invited guests to the topic of the discussion, bias towards the guests, overall dynamics of discussion, how well the host manages the discussion, what kind of questions are asked, if the host is prepared, if the host allows the guests to spread any false information, and whether the program is used for disseminating hate speech. Overall, it is assessed whether the audience gets any additional information that would support them in making an informed choice.

## Key Tendencies

- During the reporting period it became even more evident how polarized the broadcasting media is. There was bias towards the candidates and one-sided coverage, which manifested in a negative coverage of an undesirable candidate, rather than positive coverage of any candidate. Hosts of some channels directly called on the voters not to vote for a specific candidate. Basically, the talk shows on Rustavi 2 and Imedi showed alternative realities to the audience.
- Despite legal obligations<sup>1</sup>, most channels did not host any debates with the presidential candidates. Channel One and Ajara TV are the exceptions. They aired the debates of non-qualified election subjects during the monitoring period.
- TV Pirveli offered presentations of candidates to its audience, but there was no emphasis laid on a specific election programs. The public was not able to hear the analysis of presidential candidates, or any evaluation about how these promises can be kept given the limited authorities of a president.
- Grigol Vashadze, candidate of the union Power Is in Unity participated in the talk show only once, in Archevani, but he did not talk about his own program even then.
- Elections was not the main topic of discussion of talk shows. The media agenda was changed by the release of secret recordings. Initially, the secret recordings of Zaza Okruashvili, founder of the TV Company Iberia, then those of Mirza Subeliani, former employee of the Prosecutor's Office emerged to overshadow the topic of elections.
- Conflict and confrontation were often at the center of discussions in talk shows. The hosts did not research the issues linked to the topic before the program, neither did they try to provide additional information to the audience. This was clearly evident while covering the initiative on cannabis cultivation – this topic was not discussed anywhere in-depth, be it from economic or social standpoints. The main emphasis was laid on the confrontation between the Church and the ruling team.

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<sup>1</sup> A general broadcaster shall broadcast pre-election debates during electoral campaigns taking place within its service area. A general broadcaster, during electoral campaigns taking place within its service area, as well as the Public Broadcaster, shall ensure equal participation of all qualified candidates for election in election debates, without any discrimination. *Law of Georgia on Broadcasting, Article 55.*

- Iberia suspended its programs two weeks before the elections. During the whole monitoring period, the discussion focused on the events developed around Iberia only. Consequently, the channel did not perform the duty of informing the voters.

### **Channel One**

Channel One of the Public Broadcaster offered debates among candidates to the audience during the election period. Apart from this, after the news program, there were guests invited to talk about the current events. The programs Aktualuri Tema and Kviris Interviu went on air and they were also included in the report.

### **Debates 2018**

Public Broadcaster arranged 4 debates among presidential candidates during the reporting period. However, the Broadcaster did not select the participants. It offered a platform for debates to the candidates, and entrusted them to reach an agreement about who they wanted to have debates with. As a result, for example, Kakha Kukava and Kakhaber Chichinadze participated in the program three times, Giorgi Liluashvili, Besarion Tediashvili and Mikheil Gela Saluashvili – twice.

The program format envisaged a one-minute introduction by candidates. When one and the same candidate participates in the program many times, then this part becomes repetitive and loses sense. The program of October 4 stood out from others, as the candidate Giorgi Liluashvili used his 1 minute for silence, correspondingly, the audience was watching the silence.

The hosts were interested during the debates in how the candidates would evaluate the diminished powers of the president, and what they thought about the constitutional amendment regarding abolishment of direct elections for the president. Such choice of questions sounded peculiar, because these topics were discussed and debated in the past, when the Constitution was being amended. As far as further Constitutional amendments do not fall within the remits of a president and nothing will change in this respect, it was irrelevant to raise this issue during the election debates.

The host asked questions virtually about one and the same issues in all the programs. For example, on October 8 the host repeated the question from the previous program about the provision in the Constitution on the firm aspiration to integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. The host's question was worded as follows: *don't you think that this provision is no longer an act of freedom from the side of public, or even from the side of the state, but now it is turning into an obligation?* It is unclear why the journalist asked this question in several

programs, and why this can be an issue of a discussion, given the fact that the country has already reached consensus on this course.

The host asked very few follow-up questions to the guests and hardly ever requested more arguments, therefore some issues remained unclear for the audience. For example, Kakhaber Chichinadze mentioned in three programs that Georgia should reject the plan for joining NATO and declare military neutrality. The host was not interested why Georgia should reject the North Atlantic Alliance, and what a military neutrality would mean, considering that we are in a warlike situation with Russia, etc. Out of the candidates participating in the debates on October 12, only Tediashvili supported the Euro-Atlantic course. Others were talking about the anti-NATO policy and the necessity to have a dialogue with Russia. Correspondingly, it was important for the journalist to elaborate on this topic and ensure provision of diverse arguments.

Overall, the debates were more focused on allocating the time evenly among the candidates to simply provide a platform for them. The journalist had a passive role, simply followed the questions that were written in advance, and after the allocated time was over would just give the floor to the next speaker. The journalist was not an actor or a participant in the debates who would ask questions, seek arguments, try to dig out more details to provide more information to the audience. The passive role was even more apparent regarding those respondents who participated in the program several times and who were circulating xenophobic and anti-western messages. Although the host had been familiar with their attitudes, he still did not delve into the issues, to make sure that the audience does not form any prejudices.

### **Dghis Tema**

Dghis Tema was broadcasted several times a week. Frequency of this program depended on whether there were election debates among candidates that week or not. According to the format, the host had direct interviews with a respondent, who would be selected based on the main news of the day. Representatives of both ruling and opposition parties participated in it. Each of them was selected in accordance with the topic of the discussion. In most cases the host was prepared and asked adequate questions, provided quotes, asked follow-up questions and requested arguments from the guests for supporting their opinions.

However, many questions and details remained unclarified in the programs visited by the Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze (26.09) and Minister of Justice Tea Tsulukiani (1.10). There was an impression that the host refrained from pressing them.

For example, when the host asked the Mayor about the unfinished road rehabilitation projects, Kakha Kaladze was given an opportunity to talk about its success and say that the Capital has never experienced such an ‘unprecedented’ rehabilitation, and that the Mayor kept the promise according to which the hardest and most complex repair works would be completed in the city. It is not clear why the host did not provide counter arguments for the respondent or mentioned specific facts about incomplete works as far as the initial question was about the works being unfinished. The host did not follow up on his initial line, and this way allowed the Mayor to promote himself on the air.

With the question asked about Salome Zurabishvili, an independent candidate supported by the Georgian Dream, the host repeated the narrative of the ruling party, that everybody has united against Salome Zurabishvili. His question was worded as follows: *what do you think, why is there such a united campaign against Salome Zurabishvili, whom your team is supporting?*

The host was not critical to Tea Tsulukiani, Minister of Justice, either. The minister said that the authorities had not made any mistakes regarding the media freedom or human rights; however, these were the topics discussed broadly among the public during the previous weeks. Moreover, there are reports by international organizations, local organizations, expert opinions about the facts of limiting the media freedom in the country. Instead of opposing, the journalist said that some media outlets would not agree with the Minister, emphasizing that this is an opinion of some particular media outlets only.

During the whole interview the host did not ask anything about the failed justice reforms. A secret recording about alleged violence against Levan Kipiani, former minister of sports, went public the day before the interview. The host was interested only if the Kipiani case should be separated from the Omega Group case, during the investigation.

Tsulukiani attacked the NGOs and criticized them multiple times during the program; harsh counter-criticism had been voiced by NGOs towards the minister. The journalist did not oppose the guest with the counter-arguments, and his questions to the minister started with *they [the NGOs] are saying...* the formulation left the impression that the journalist was diminishing the value of counter-arguments provided by NGOs.

Overall, it was a superficial interview and only aimed at promoting the respondent’s positions regarding certain issues. The journalist did not touch upon the judiciary reform, its flawed development and problems within this system. This is the topic for which the minister was responsible and for which the NGO representatives kept criticizing her. Even though the

program intro mentioned that the NGOs and the opposition had boycotted the Inter-Agency Task Force led by the Minister, this topic was never discussed in the program.

### **Kviris Interviu**

During the reporting period Kviris Interviu was aired only three times and hosted the monitoring subject only once – Vice Speaker of the Parliament from the ruling party Tamar Chugoshvili (27.09). Format of the program envisaged having a face-to-face interview with a respondent, so, in this case too, the host focused on the current affairs. He touched upon many issues, including the events developed around the TV Company Iberia, secret recordings, election campaign. At the end of the week, much time was dedicated to the evaluation of the Prime Minister's speech at the UN General Assembly. In total, as there were many topics raised, the host was not able to discuss each of them at full length. The host was prepared for the program and provided quotes from the speeches of officials, and provided examples from various researches.

### **Aktualuri Tema**

Aktualuri Tema was aired only three times during the monitoring period. Among them, the monitoring subjects participated only in two cases. Presidential candidates Kakha Kukava and Zurab Japaridze talked in both programs. Topic of the first program was church and state; and the hosts talked about the election environment in the second program, together with other, yet non-qualified presidential candidates.

The program and the host's question were superficial. She observed the discussion between the respondents and got involved at times with additional questions. On September 21, all of her questions were focused to one issue only – to have the respondents evaluate whether the church's protest regarding the cannabis cultivation initiative was an interference in public administration or not. The host's questions did not contain any factual data, which would enable the guests expand the topic and which would provide more information to the audience as well. *What is your say about this process? What did you see after observing the events developed recently?* – this is how the questions were worded in most cases.

On September 28, when the presidential candidates were visiting the program, the host was asking one and the same question to all the candidates. For example, she asked everyone to evaluate the offer made by the Channel One to the candidates to participate in its programs, which the host considered unprecedented. She spent much time on discussing technicalities



with the guests, for example, who got how much airtime, why a specific guest was invited to the studio, why Davit Usupashvili went live from another location, etc. There were no questions asked about the candidates' programs. In this program too, the host asked general questions, such as – how the guests would evaluate the election environment, what their next step would be, if they did not get a desirable result in the elections. The host was not properly prepared. For example, she could have referred to various research by local or international organizations while talking about the media environment, and she could also have made comparisons with the media environment during previous presidential elections.

## **Rustavi 2**

TV Company Rustavi 2 broadcasted two talk shows – Archevani and Kviris Aktsentebi. During previous years, the channel presented the candidates' programs, or conducted thematic debates, however, this year the channel did not offer similar formats to the audience. Salome Zurabishvili, an independent candidate supported by the ruling party was negatively covered in both programs.

### **Archevani**

The talk show Archevani was aired every Tuesday, but there were exceptions, when the channel offered this program to the audience twice a week. Topics of all the programs were focused on current events and there were no debates among presidential candidates. Correspondingly, the audience did not get information about particular election promises, their relevance and visions of the candidates.

The program hosted the representatives of authorities and opposition too, however, there were cases (18.09, 25.09), when nobody from the ruling party participated in the program and the allegations of opposition party members remained unanswered. The host let the opposition representatives feel free to use the program for criticizing the authorities and talk about the need to replace them. At this time the host only played a role of a moderator and did not interfere in the discussion even when the respondents talked about other issues outside the topic of the discussion.

On October 2, the host let the representatives of the authorities and those of the opposition to confront one another: one part of the guests concentrates on the “nine-year rule”, and the other half was talking about the “six-year rule”. The host had to refer to verbal and physical efforts to calm them down. This tension was a result of the host's inability to focus a discussion

on one particular issue. During the entire program he made few comments and asked only one question, which he ended with the phrase: *now you talk among yourself, I am not your opponent any longer*. It was unclear why the host decided to play a passive role instead of asking questions. In total, the audience saw meaningless counter-allegations and broil.

### **Kviris Aktsentebi**

The program is broadcasted every week and it stands out from all the other programs. This is also demonstrated in the intro of the program: *the journalist Eka Kvesitadze and Director General of Rustavi 2 Nika Gvaramia are not reluctant to present their attitudes to these events*. Correspondingly, it is clear that the program discusses the issues from the subjective perspective of the hosts. Kviris Aktsentebi and its hosts openly oppose the authorities and the candidate they support – Salome Zurabishvili. They call her a traitor, a Putin, a shameful candidate and call on the voters not to support Zurabishvili. The hosts think that voting for her means voting for the independence of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region (16.09). Nika Gvaramia also started a certain campaign against Zurabishvili – a Chili Challenge – he ate chili on air with the slogan No to Salome Zurabishvili! Then he called on the audience to eat chili in front of the camera if they are against Salome Zurabishvili, and to condemn her.

Alongside criticism of Zurabishvili, there were positive messages heard in the program about Grigol Vashadze. It was mentioned that he conducted the presidential campaign in the right manner and correctly managed advantageous topics, such as the campaign against marijuana cultivation. In order to support these opinions, the hosts provided findings of the research by Edison Research, according to which Vashadze had more supporters than all the other candidates. Even the invited hosts criticized Salome Zurabishvili and focused their attention on supporting Grigol Vashadze.

The hosts also voiced some grave allegations in the programs. For example (23.09), according to Gvaramia, Soso Gogashvili, former head of the State Security Service was fired because of diverse circumstances, among them, money appropriation for the elections, also because his command is heard in the radio about liquidating Temirlan Machalikashvili. It was not clarified for the audience what these allegations are based on. This case was not an exception.

The hosts also did not ask for arguments and corroboration of facts from the respondents. For example, (16.09) when going live in the program, ex-president Saakashvili developed a conspiracy theory, according to which the stink bug was artificially introduced in Georgia. This would bring the prices on land down; than these lands would be purchased for marijuana

plantations, and Bidzina Ivanishvili, a ‘Russian oligarch’ is a mastermind of all this. The hosts did not ask any clarification questions in this respect.

The hosts used insulting expressions. For example, they said about Salome Zurabishvili that *she has mental problems; she is holding a hammer in her hand and if you manage to make her drop it, she will take another one and smash her head with it (23.09)*. The hosts referred to Irakli Kobakhidze as *nothingness (9.09)*, they referred to the authorities as *unicellular infusoria (14.10)* Kakha Kaladze was called a *kleptomaniac*. The hosts also used some profanity as well (14.10).

In total, this program was clearly biased against the candidate supported by the government. The guests of the program developed the same narrative as well. In general, representatives of the authorities or their supporters who had different opinions did not participate in the program. The hosts explained this bias with the argument that this is not just ordinary elections, but a referendum about the foreign course of Georgia. Even if this argument is valid, still, expression of such bias by the program hosts contradicts to the professional standards and general rules of election coverage.

## **Imedi**

There was a talk show Pirispir broadcasted on Imedi. Subject of the monitoring was also the live broadcast of guests during the news program Qronika on Saturdays. The channel did not offer debates of presidential candidates to the audience.

### **Pirispir**

The talk show Pirispir is broadcasted once a week on Imedi. During the reporting period, members of both the ruling and opposition parties visited the program, however, the host mentioned several times that the National Movement refused to participate in the program. Presidential candidates also visited the program, but there were no debates arranged among them. They were answering to the host’s questions in the format of a face-to-face interview. There was a bias against Grigol Vashadze, the candidate of the National Movement, which was observed in the introduction speech of the host and his questions.

*The people are facing a choice – a repressive ruling, which was over in 2012, or a democratic state. It is a fact that this fight affects the voters most of all, whose opinions are of little interest for the Saakashvili’s team, however, others do not have an opportunity to conduct the elections with western standards. The news is dedicated mostly to the black PR planned by the National*

*Movement members and their attempt to discredit the Georgian Dream. Grigol Vashadze's TV-boycott appeared to be the part of his Soviet campaign, which they declared to my program and today they refused to present the election program via the Imedi TV, - said the host in his introduction to the program on October 9. The host referred to Grigol Vashadze as Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Government who lost the war in the program on September 18. Although Salome Zurabishvili was a Minister of Foreign Affairs during the same government, the host evaluated her biography as 'impressive'.*

In his introduction speech to the same program on September 18, the host spoke as if only the National Movement, Grigol Vashadze, Mikheil Saakashvili and their supporters fight against Salome Zurabishvili and criticize her because of her statements about Russia. However, Salome Zurabishvili was in fact criticized by other political forces and some part of voters as well. The program never mentioned anything about Zurabishvili's statements about Russia. It was the authorities that spread this message as if the opposition creates a negative background for Salome Zurabishvili. Moreover, in addition to the host's soft tone, Salome Zurabishvili almost made the host say that it was her who took the Russian troops out of Georgia. After that the host asked: *National Movement, also their presidential candidate Grigol Vashadze, who was a citizen of Russia and worked at the Foreign agency, and I have written it out, in the space and nuclear fields, says that you are a traitor and they also say that you are the agent of Russia. How can we explain this?* The host never provided a quote because of which Salome Zurabishvili was called a traitor.

The host dedicated another program on September 25 to how everybody ob against Salome Zurabishvili. Irakli Chikhladze pointed out several times that Salome Zurabishvili was an object of attacks when she was called a 'traitor' and talked about the campaign initiated against her. However, he did not say anything about the similar campaign against Grigol Vashadze, where he was also referred to as Russia's agent and a 'KGB man'. In this context, it is very interesting that there was a compilation of videos shown during the program, where the presidential candidate Grigol Vashadze, Davit Bakradze and Zurab Japaridze were giving promises that go beyond the remnants of a president. The host asked the guests to comment on these unrealistic promises. However, there was not even a single phrase by Salome Zurabishvili in this compilation. The host explained this fact that he tried hard but could not find any. Another media outlet, for example, the radio Liberty managed to find unrealistic promises by Zurabishvili and offered it to its audience a week before Imedi's program. The Radio Liberty talked about two promises by Zurabishvili, where she makes promises about withdrawing Russian troops from the Occupied territories of Georgia and improving the demographic

situation in the country. In fact, a president does not have any direct leverage to resolve any of these issues.

There is an impression that the host repeats the messages in the program, which the government tries to disseminate, and it is not critical to the representatives of authorities; he asks the questions which let them present their activities positively. For example, on September 11 the host started his talk to the Minister of Justice Tea Tsulukiani with the question – *why the Minister of Justice had to resign and why she did not do it?* This way the respondent had a chance to talk in a desirable direction and criticize the Investigation Commission. Although the Investigation Commission described the actual shortcomings which were found in the investigation of Saralidze case, the host asked a question with the following wording – *if the shortcomings are identified, who will be responsible?*

Presidential candidates visited the program too, but there were no debates arranged among them, and the host had face-to-face interviews with them. Visits of party representatives in the studio took place in the environment of counter allegations.

### **Qronika**

The monitoring was focused on the part of Saturday's Qronika where the guests are invited. The host mostly had individual interviews with the respondents about current issues and attempted to get additional information. The Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze went live in the program (22.09) during his visit to the US. The host's questions were about his visit and were not critical to the Prime Minister. The host did not provide counter arguments even when the Prime Minister talked about the economic growth.

The host did not act as an opponent to the MP Mamuka Mdinardze (6.10), when he said that the Georgian Dream is quite right regarding some issues, such as the human rights, freedom of business, media freedom, etc. In response to this, the journalist said that there are some question marks about the freedom of business because of the recordings of Zaza Okuashvili, owner of Omega. Basically, with this the host agreed to the respondent that there are no problems in this country regarding the freedom of the media and human rights in general, however, some local and international reports underline the existing problems in this respect.

### **TV Pirveli**

There are several talk shows broadcasted via TV Pirveli every day: Khalkhis Politika, Reaktsia, (twice a week), Politmetri, Pirvelebi. Each of them is focused on current news, this is why one

and the same topic is often discussed, and the discussions are similar. Correspondingly, sometimes it is difficult to see any difference among them content-wise.

### **Politmetri**

The program Politmetri is on air every Wednesday to discuss the current events. Members of ruling and opposition parties participate in the program. The host did not try to avoid asking pressing questions to the representatives of authorities. She was well-prepared and knew the topic of the discussion well. However, the program did not envisage the election programs and their critical analysis.

There were cases when the host's questions were general: *What does Ivanishvili want from these elections? What makes these elections peculiar?* – experienced politicians, who were invited to the programs, used such questions well to give a desirable direction to the discussion.

### **Reaktsia**

Reaktsia was on air twice a week and focused on current events. The guests were selected accordingly. Interview with high-ranking officials, for example, with the Speaker of the Parliament also touched upon the current issues. Representatives of the ruling party and the opposition visited the program. Election programs of presidential candidates were not discussed in this program, either.

Unlike previous years, there were much less cases of having irrelevant guests invited to the program who would use the hate speech and insult one another. This year the host was more concentrated on specific topics and tried to have a hard talk format with government representatives and did not refrain from opposing to them. However, in some cases it seemed that the host did not have a clear focus. Therefore, when the host followed the arguments of a respondent, she provided little facts, data, quotes or videos. This was clearly seen during the interview with Irakli Kobakhidze, Speaker of the Parliament on September 25. For example, when Kobakhidze said that after the special operation held at Bassiani nights club, the killer drug is no more sold there and the problem is solved; however, the host did not remind him that the Ministry of Internal Affairs did not arrest drug dealers in the territory of the club and there was little proof that the drugs were sold in the club; the people died outside the club after taking some unidentified substance.

The program addressed the issues mostly in a superficial manner, with confrontations. For example, on September 13, when the discussion was about marijuana cultivation and its usage for medical purposes, the host was trying to raise the single issue during the whole program –

a large group of people is against the initiative of marijuana cultivation, this large group is backed by the church and the emphasis was laid whether the government is able to have this issue finalized or not. In fact, there was insufficient information communicated about what economic estimates the government has, what cases we see in other countries, how realistic it would be for Georgia to get an economic benefit, what direct or adverse effects are expected, etc. First the information should be provided and then the positions should be argued, not vice versa. The journalist should have sought information in this respect and be prepared to discuss this topic with the respondents.

### **Sakhalkho Politika**

The program had several guests every time it was on air. Mostly the public representatives prevailed, who are not the monitoring subjects. Sometimes their relevance to the topic was arguable. Some guests were often speaking at the same time during the program and it was hard to understand the meaning. However, the host was well informed, asked probing questions, and if needed changed the wording and repeated the questions in order to get answers to them. Neither did this program discuss election programs.

### **Pirvelebi**

The program focused on current affairs of the week, and at the end of the reporting period they started to invite presidential candidates and their supporters, and to introduce them to the public. Zura Japaridze (28.09) and Davit Usupashvili (5.10) visited the program during the reporting period. However, candidate selection principle and frequency remained vague, because there was no candidate presented during the program on October 12. Neither was there any clarification provided to the audience about it.

Invitation of candidates to the program aimed at communicating their views. The questions were general – *why do you want to become a president of Georgia? What will you be able to change? What makes you different from others?* etc. There were supporters in the studio who were asked why they were supporting the presented candidate. No critical questions were asked.

Unlike candidate presentations, the hosts were prepared in cases when they discussed current affairs and asked critical questions. For example, while talking about the support of the ruling party to the presidential candidate Salome Zurabishvili (28.09), they acted as a good opponent to Archil Talakvadze, when he tried to present the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia as her achievement only in the capacity of the minister of foreign affairs. There were debates in the program between the representatives of authorities and opposition on various topics.

There were cases when the hosts failed to manage a discussion. For example, there was a tension on September 21 when the guests had verbal confrontation in the studio. The guests were insulting each other. The hosts could not deescalate the situation and then had to cut the program off with commercials.

## **Iberia**

The talk show Tavisupali Sivrtse was monitored on TV Company Iberia, which was aired every weekday. This program stood out by hardly ever having any topic discussed but the events<sup>2</sup> that were taking place around this TV Company, which fails to satisfy the interest of voters. The channel shut down all the programs at the end of the monitoring period.

### **Tavisupali Sivrtse**

As far as the discussion topic in this program was about this channel, the journalists were a party in this process, so, it is difficult to talk about the impartiality. The hosts failed to be distanced from the topic. Even though they have been talking about this single topic for two months, the program was more oriented on superficial evaluations instead of exchanging facts, inquiry or in-depth analysis of events. The host asked the invited public representatives or politicians to evaluate the events developed around Iberia, express their forecasts, what would be the further development of this case, etc. The respondents criticized the authorities too. Even the secret recordings involving Zaza Okuashvili, the founder of this channel were publicized by another channel – Rustavi 2; Rustavi 2 also aired an interview with Okuashvili, where he raised important allegations against the authorities. Iberia had to spread this exclusive information about the founder of its own channel based on Rustavi 2. Tavisupali Sivrtse was not able to provide new and additional information to the audience about this matter.

There were ungrounded allegations heard in the program and the host did not ask the respondents to provide specific arguments and evidence. For example, there was a live broadcast of Mikheil Saakashvili, ex-president of Georgia on September 21, which took place as a monologue. The host let the guest to speak about how Bidzina Ivanishvili bribed a presidential candidate Zurab Japaridze, paid him money to leave the National Movement and

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<sup>2</sup> The journalists said on [September 7](#) that the authorities put the TV company under pressure by creating problems to the financing company. Later, secret phone recordings were disseminated between the founders and former high-ranking officials, which generated concerns among the public about so called elite corruption.



to form his own party, and then had Japaridze plan a false campaign about marijuana decriminalization. The host did not probe based on what the respondent made these statements, if there are any facts to prove these allegations.

Sometimes the guests diverted from the topic of the program and talked about other issues, such as, the previous government and their mistakes, corruption, homicides committed during the rule of current and previous authorities, torture at prison, etc. Sometimes they also insulted one another.

Overall, the audience failed to receive information on elections during the run up to the elections. Visions of the candidates remained unknown. No debates were carried out among them.

There was a case of xenophobia at the program as well. On September 24, a presidential candidate Shalva Natelashvili provided a negative evaluation of introducing a visa-free regime for the citizens of Iran: *There are 20 flights a day [from Iran] and the planes leave empty from here. There will be nothing left from Georgia... This is why as soon as I become a President, my first step will be to end the visa-free regime with Iran.* Topic of the program was again the case of Iberia, and this xenophobic opinion, which was expressed out of context and contained wrong facts (there are no 20 flights from Iran) was left without any response from the host.

### **Maestro**

There are no talk shows programs broadcasted via Maestro, this is why only the guests' live broadcasts were monitored in the news program Kontaqti.

### **Kontaqti**

There was a face-to-face interview with the guests, and there was no discussion offered to the audience, although it was a statutory obligation. Topic of the program was mostly around the current events. This is why the host tried to receive information from a respondent about the issue of the discussion, and was less focused on criticism or asking hard questions.

Among presidential candidates, only Davit Usupashvili (26.09) and Zura Japaridze (10.10) visited the program during the reporting period. The host was asking more general questions to Zura Japaridze, instead of elaborating on specific election programs. For example, the host told the right-wing Zura Japaridze that he imagines him to be a pacifist and is surprised when Japaridze denies that. The host thinks that it is a proof of pacifism when Girchi supports

abolishing of the mandatory military service. Here Japaridze had to explain that as he believes, our country should spend more for the defence, but he merely thinks that it should be on a professional army.

The host was also interested if Japaridze would remain to be a Girchi Church member after he became a president. It appeared that the host did not know that Zura Japaridze does not have any position in this church, which was formed for avoiding the mandatory conscription thanks to a legislative gap. While these issues were discussed, other important subjects were put aside, which Zurab Japaridze had elaborated in his election visions.

### **Obiektivi**

A program Ghamis Studia was monitored on TV Company Obiektivi, which is aired every day. Like previous years, this program has been a broadcasting platform for the Alliance of Patriots during the reporting period.

#### **Ghamis Studia**

Representatives of the Alliance of Patriots participated in the program as guests and as hosts as well. For example, the political secretary Vazha Otarashvili, who visits Ghamis Studia in the capacity of a respondent, is also hosting the cycle of programs Literature, Art, Spirituality on the same channel. In total, 14 representatives of the Alliance of Patriots visited the program during the reporting period, whereas the number of other party representatives did not exceed 3. This is how many times the representatives of the Georgian Dream and the Georgian Troupe participated in the program.

There were 70 programs broadcasted during the reporting period and the monitoring subjects participated only in 30 of them. Compared to the elections in 2016-2017, the appearance rate for the members of the Alliance of Patriots has sharply decreased, which can be explained by the fact that this party does not have a presidential candidate this year.

Presidential candidates also visited Ghamis Studia in September, among them: Giorgi Andriadze, Kakha Kukava, Zaur Nachkebia, Besarion Tediashvili, Teimuraz Shashiashvili, Mikheil-Gela Saluashvili. The host talked about different topics to each of them. There were no debates among the candidates.

Sometimes the host did not have a guest and it was the host who communicated his own opinions to the audience. For example, the host Bondo Mdzinarashvili directly called on to the

voters on August 29 not to elect Grigol Vashadze, candidate of the Power Is in Unity and Davit Bakradze, candidate of the European Georgia. *It does not matter whether its name is European Georgia or African Uganda now. You should not support any of the representatives of the National Movement in any case,* - said the host Bondo Mdzinarashvili, who was a majoritarian candidate for the Alliance of Patriots in 2016.

This host and the channel in general explicitly criticize the National Movement and the European Georgia. For example, Bondo Mdzinarashvili refers to the European Georgia as “Bokerville,” and the National Movement – as a “National Sect.”

The host is hardly ever critical. There are more friendly talks rather than talk shows. The same format was used for talking to presidential candidates, who discussed many topics without opposing to one another. Neither did they analyse the candidates’ election programs. The talks with the presidential candidate Giorgi Andriadze on September 12 was accompanied with xenophobia and homophobia, to which the host did not respond adequately. On the contrary, he shared the same rhetoric as well.

Hate speech is not an exception in this program and it is possible to say that it has become a trend. Turks, Iranians, Arabs, Indians are represented as threats to Georgians. Turkey is depicted as an invader and is compared to the Russian occupation, and the hosts and respondents provide historical events to support this statement. With such approach the program shows that Russia is not the only occupant and creates a certain alternative within the public. For example, the host Giorgi Kasradze addresses the guest Vazha Otarashvili: *this is the region of Ajara, and there is an open and explicit interest of the Turkish government for Ajara, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Guria*. It is unclear based on what factual circumstances the host is saying that the Republic of Turkey can have some kind of political interests in these regions.

At the same time, the program shapes the idea that the title of an occupant for Russia is a populist thing and the result of pseudo patriotism. Correspondingly, the host considers that this policy has established under the western influence. *The war lost with Tskhinvali* – this is how the Vazha Otarashvili, who visited the program as a guest (12.10), refers to the Russian occupation in August 2008.

In general, there are strong anti-western narrative and euro scepticism still heard in the program. The program presents the west as a power, which interferes in the internal politics. The host Nino Ratishvili referred to the US as Uncle Sam several times on September 3 – this is an ironic nickname of the United States of America, which the Russian propaganda forces

most frequently use throughout the world and in Georgia as well. *Uncle Sam wants this Bakradze to become a president, and our Uncle Bidzina will not go against Uncle Sam. These are the questions I start to have.*

It is quite usual for this program to be saturated with ungrounded, unreasoned and conspiracy theories. For example, the host Nino Ratishvili said on August 24 that *there is a masonic gathering at Chonkadze Street for founding a masonic lodge of Caucasus.* She also assumed that they might have much money, which is dangerous. It remained unclear based on what the journalist spread this information.

### **Ajara TV**

The monitoring was conducted for the part of the program Mtavari broadcasted via the Public Broadcaster of Ajara TV, where the respondents were invited for discussions, and Debatebi 2018.

#### **Debatebi 2018**

During the monitoring period, the debates were broadcasted via the Ajara TV only once (15.09), where three non-qualified candidates participated. The host asked four questions to the presidential candidates, and each of them had two minutes for answering. Despite strictly defined time limits, the host tried to ask counter questions to the candidates and to act as an opponent to them this way. In the last part of the talk show, the journalist asked the candidates about their programs, but the host's questions were quite vague and unclearly worded. For example: *what is your main promise, you have emphasized preterm parliamentary elections several times, about recalling the MPs, you have somehow mentioned that in many contexts.* It would be better if the host quoted from the candidate's program in order to make questions more understandable.

#### **Mtavari**

Monitoring was conducted for the part of the analytical news program Mtavari, where the guests were talking about many different issues. Mostly they were selected in accordance with current news. In most cases the host was prepared and tried to conduct the interview in an informative manner, supported with facts. The host acted as an opponent to the guests.

The discussion held on October 6 was less informative, where the representatives of the Georgian Dream and the National Movement were talking about the construction at Green

Cape (Mtsvane Kontskhi). The guest managed to avoid the host's questions and talk about the issue in general. Instead of focusing on the problems he reminded the opponent of the past. The guests continued the interview in the mode of putting blame on one another.

The host looked weak on September 22 as well, when members of two parties, National Movement and Georgian Dream participated. During a 20-minute discussion the host intervened only several times and mostly played a role of a moderator. The guests were discussing the planned changes to the regulations of the Supreme Council in this program. Correspondingly, the details and significance of this discussion was difficult for an ordinary audience to understand.